

No. 10.—CHESTER

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# Portfolio OF English Cathedrals



With Historical and  
Architectural Notes  
By ARNOLD FAIRBAIRNS

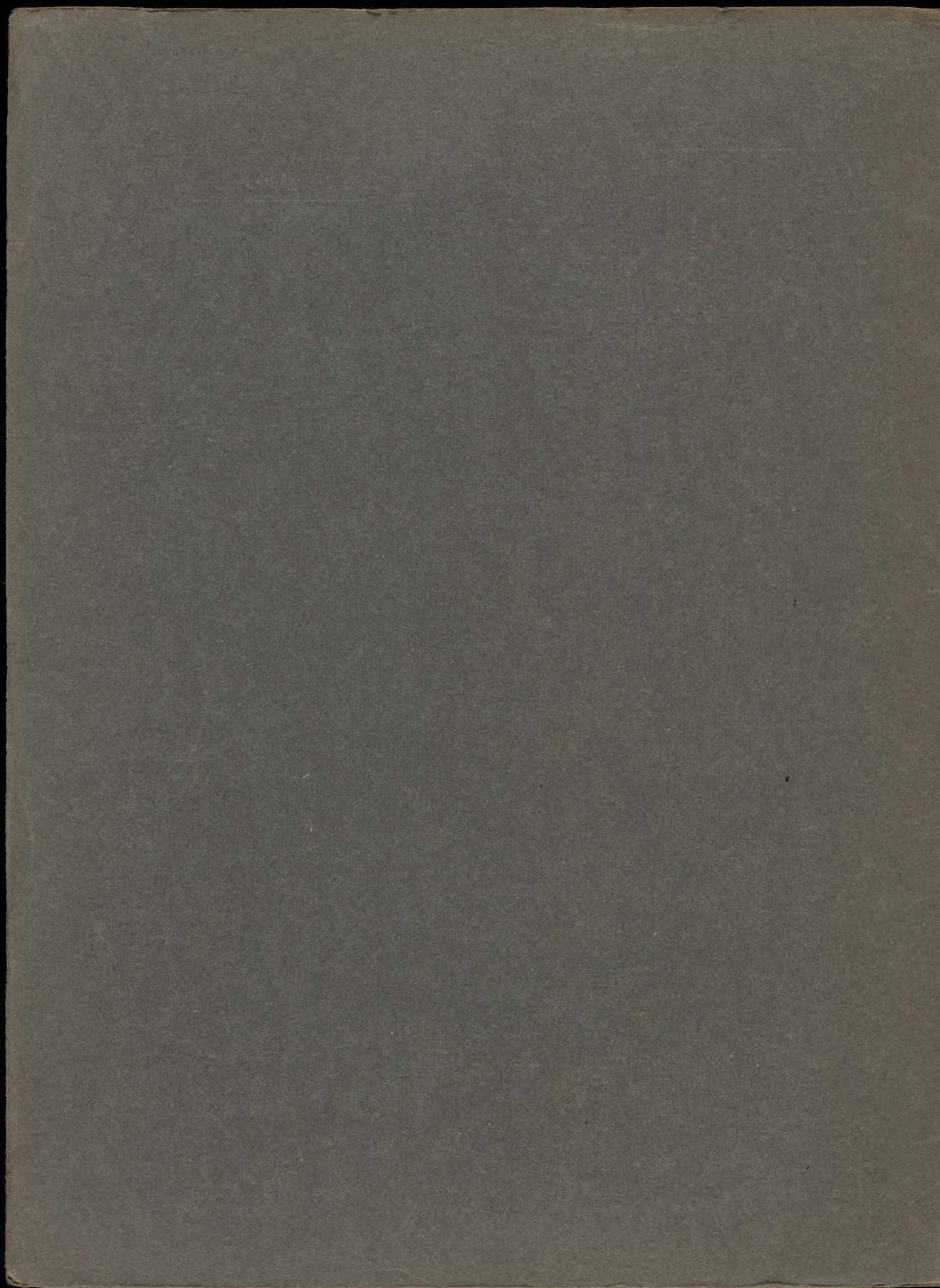


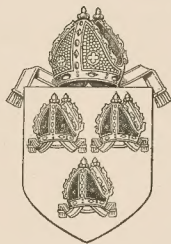
## CHESTER

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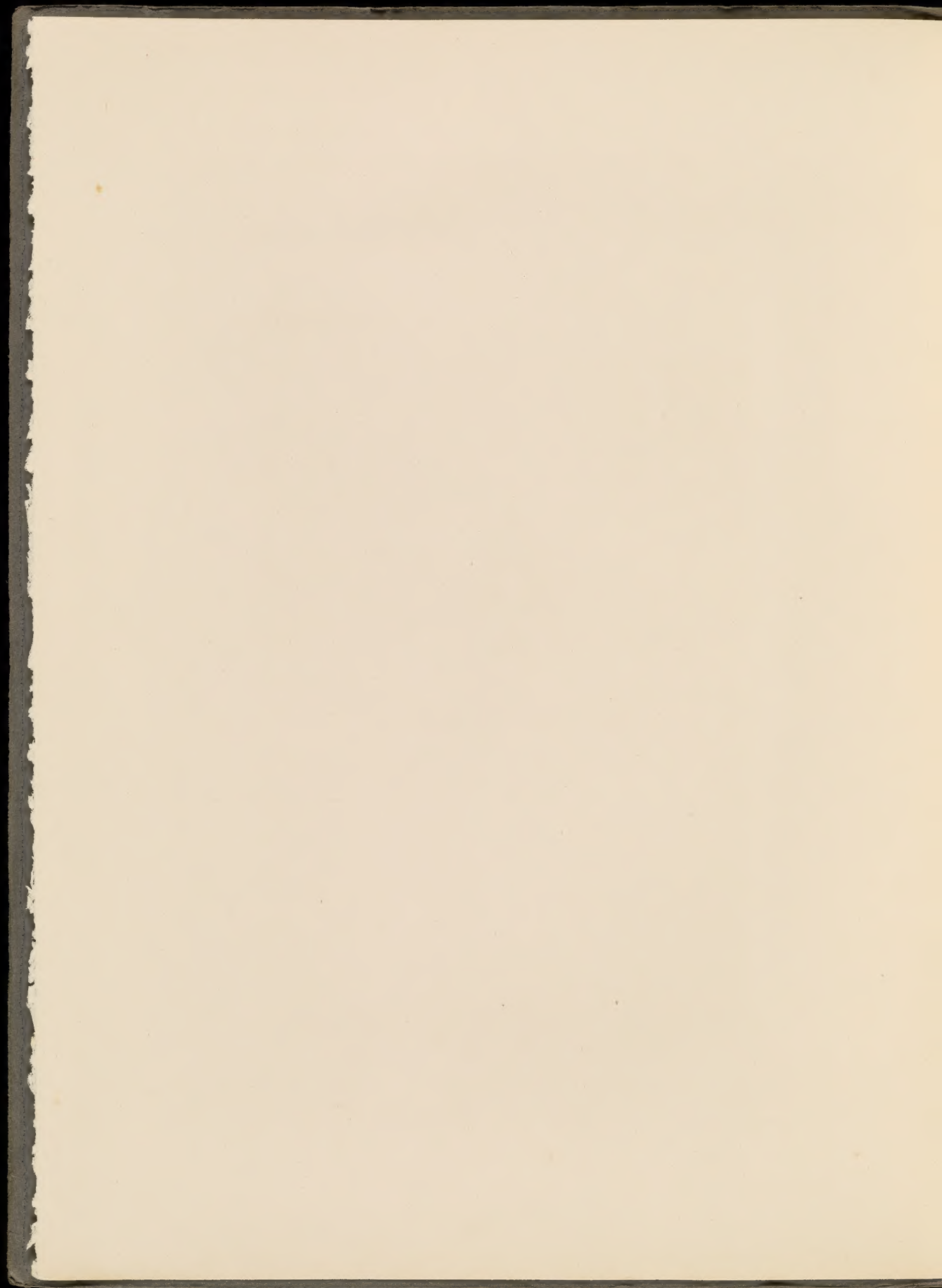






CHESTER CATHEDRAL





## INTRODUCTION



**S**T. WERBURGH was grand-daughter of Anna, King of the East Angles, and therefore related to the great Ethelreda, founder and first abbess of the monastery at Ely. There Werburgh took the veil and in time succeeded to the rule of the house, as well as to that of two similar establishments in Staffordshire. At her death, towards the close of the seventh century, her body was after some dispute interred at Hanbury, one of her houses, and here it remained till 875. In that year fear of the Danes who were ravaging Mercia prompted the translation of the precious relics to Chester, where the church of St. Peter and St. Paul afforded a suitable resting place.

Early in the tenth century Ethelred, the Ealdorman, rebuilt this church and dedicated the new building in the names of St. Werburgh and St. Oswald. His foundation of secular canons flourished till 1095, when Hugh of Avranches, nicknamed Lupus, founded, on the advice of Anselm, a Benedictine monastery—probably in expiation of his cruel Welsh wars. This monastery, famous for its wealth, its fair, and its miracle plays, was suppressed by Henry VIII., and part of its revenue devoted to the endowment of the new bishopric of Chester. There had been one bishop of Chester previously for Peter, Bishop of Lichfield, had moved his seat to St. John's Church just outside the walls in 1075. His successor, however, had moved away to Coventry and the title had fallen into disuse. The arms of the bishopric commemorate the three seats of the bishop, Lichfield, Coventry, and Chester, by three mitres.

A few names of more than ordinary interest occur among the bishops of Chester: Brian Walton (1660—62), the editor of the great Polyglot Bible; John Wilkins (1668—72), one of the founders of the Royal Society and a voluminous scientific author; and above all, John Pearson (1673—86), whose "Expositions of the Creed" have been described as "one of the noblest contributions to theological science ever made by the English Church."

Little record beyond the stones themselves is left to tell the history of the abbey and cathedral church. Immense damage seems to have been inflicted in the Civil War, during which Chester, being the nearest port to Ireland, was a place of great strategic importance. Various attempts at restoration were made at different times, but it was not till 1868 that the great restoration of Dean Howson really secured the stability of the whole building. In that year Sir Gilbert Scott began his work, which though most severely, and at times justly, criticised, undoubtedly saved much from actual ruin.

During the nineteenth century the area of the original diocese was reduced by the creation of the new sees of Ripon, Manchester and Liverpool, which the immense increase in the population of those districts demanded. As at present constituted the diocese is coterminous with the county palatine itself.

### FROM THE SOUTH-EAST

CHESTER, like York, has preserved its beautiful walls with wonderful completeness. Indeed its ancient defences and quaint Rows have gained the city a wider reputation than the cathedral would ever have done. It is from the walls that the best views of the great church are obtained and the visitor would do well to approach from Eastgate rather than from the narrow lanes at the west end.

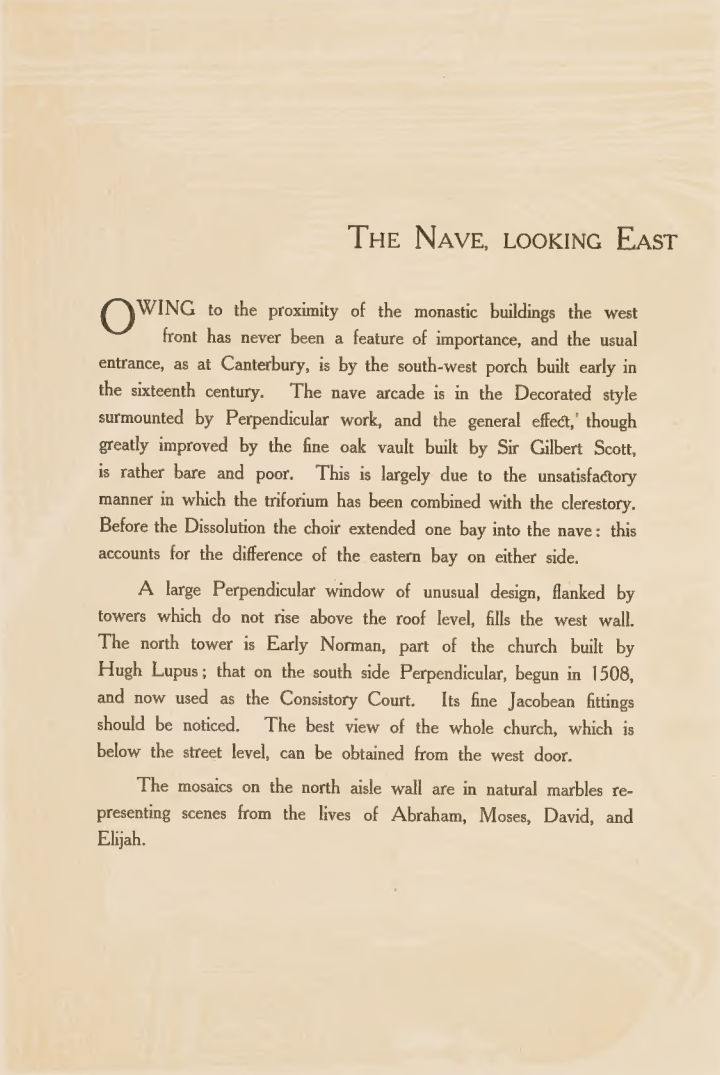
Rising beyond a green-clad church-yard of immemorial antiquity the beautiful warm red stone of the cathedral makes a picture of great beauty in spite of its new appearance. The most prominent features are the unusually large south transept, the finely proportioned Lady Chapel, and the curious termination of the south choir aisle. The two latter are almost entirely the work of Sir Gilbert Scott, and form part of the restoration begun in 1868. At that time the whole of the south side of the cathedral was recased, for the soft sandstone was in a ruinous condition, and the Perpendicular south aisle pulled down and rebuilt on the original plan. This once more opened to view the two western windows of the Lady Chapel, and led to the building of the extinguisher roof over the aisle apse, a work of considerable interest but doubtful beauty.



CHESTER CATHEDRAL



FROM THE SOUTH-EAST



## THE NAVE, LOOKING EAST

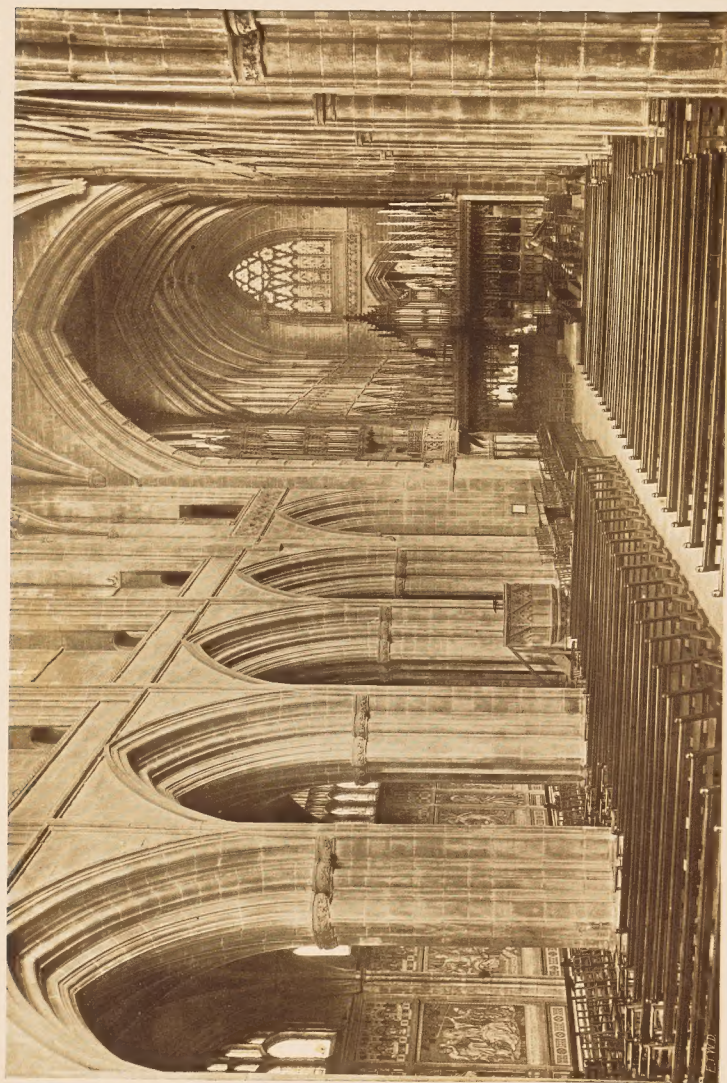
OWING to the proximity of the monastic buildings the west front has never been a feature of importance, and the usual entrance, as at Canterbury, is by the south-west porch built early in the sixteenth century. The nave arcade is in the Decorated style surmounted by Perpendicular work, and the general effect, though greatly improved by the fine oak vault built by Sir Gilbert Scott, is rather bare and poor. This is largely due to the unsatisfactory manner in which the triforium has been combined with the clerestory. Before the Dissolution the choir extended one bay into the nave: this accounts for the difference of the eastern bay on either side.

A large Perpendicular window of unusual design, flanked by towers which do not rise above the roof level, fills the west wall. The north tower is Early Norman, part of the church built by Hugh Lupus; that on the south side Perpendicular, begun in 1508, and now used as the Consistory Court. Its fine Jacobean fittings should be noticed. The best view of the whole church, which is below the street level, can be obtained from the west door.

The mosaics on the north aisle wall are in natural marbles representing scenes from the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, and Elijah.



CHESTER CATHEDRAL



THE NAVE, LOOKING EAST

## THE NORTH TRANSEPT

THOUGH few fragments of the church built in 1095 remain, sufficient indications have been discovered for a complete plan of it to be traced. The foundations of the choir and aisle apses, the north wall of the nave, the original north-west tower, clearly show that its main dimensions were very similar to those of the existing church. Here, in the north transept, an excellent idea of the elevation of the Norman building can be obtained. Opening out of the east side of the transept there was originally an apsidal chapel, now the Canons' Vestry. Chester, in fact, like Gloucester, probably had five apses. The primitive character of the masonry and the simple moulding of the capitals in the triforium show clearly the early date of the work.

The magnificent tomb and canopy commemorate Chester's most famous bishop, John Pearson, whom Burnet calls "the greatest divine of the age." For two hundred years there was not even a tablet to record his connexion with the see. To Dr. Whittingham, Bishop of Maryland, is due the idea of raising a fitting memorial; to Sir Arthur W. Blomfield, the design itself.

## THE SOUTH TRANSEPT

EQUAL in area to the choir, but little smaller than the nave, and with double aisles, this transept is one of the features which makes Chester unique among our great churches. From very early times the transept was used as the parish church of S. Oswald, but when it was rebuilt in the fifteenth century the monks, by providing a new church elsewhere, thought to rid themselves of their unwelcome fellow-worshippers. A bitter dispute ensued, but for once the monastery had to give way, and a door cut through the wall in the south-west corner commemorates the final triumph of the citizens. This parochial use continued till 1880, when the transept was once more opened into the cathedral and a separate parish church again provided.

In 1902 the whole transept was restored in memory of the first Duke of Westminster, whose monument is a noteworthy example of modern workmanship. The whitewash was stripped from the walls, several windows filled with good glass, and the vault, which had never been finished, built in oak like the nave. Lord Egerton, of Tatton, restored the great south window in 1887. It appears to have been inspired by the famous east window at Carlisle. A memorial of unusual simplicity and beauty has recently been erected in memory of the men of the Cheshire Regiment who fell in the South African war.



CHESTER CATHEDRAL



THE SOUTH TRANSEPT



THE NORTH TRANSEPT

## THE CHOIR, LOOKING WEST

WHATEVER feeling of disappointment may be caused by the nave of Chester the choir easily removes. The view from the altar westwards is one of exceptional and undefinable beauty. No English cathedral, save perhaps Lincoln, can show stalls of equal magnificence and delicacy of workmanship, while all the modern work, including the screen, has been executed with a feeling and spirit which leave little to be desired. The original stalls are of the fifteenth century and, with four exceptions, retain their finely carved misereres, which display the usual grotesque, satirical, and sacred subjects.

In the great restoration the organ was removed from the choir screen and placed across the north transept, a very unusual position. The cross which hangs at the entrance of the choir is made from a magnificent candelabrum which was for some time a notable feature of the church. Unfortunately the heat from it damaged the organ and it had to be removed.

It was long thought that the tower piers contained a core of Norman work. During the last restoration, however, several thirteenth-century gravestones were found in the foundations, clearly proving a complete reconstruction in that century.



CHESTER CATHEDRAL



THE CHOIR, LOOKING WEST

## THE CHOIR, LOOKING EAST

THE Chester architects seem, in the designing of their church, to have failed at many points where their contemporaries achieved their greatest triumphs. This is specially noticeable in the eastern termination of the choir which is weak when compared with the stately creations at Ely, Salisbury, or Lincoln, or indeed with the rest of the choir itself.

Access to the beautiful Lady Chapel, in which the shrine of St. Werburgh stood, was only possible through the single eastern arch until the sixteenth century, when the choir aisles were extended. Two bays of the Lady Chapel were then enclosed, and the north aisle still preserves this arrangement. The south aisle has been pulled down and rebuilt in its thirteenth-century form.

After being used as the bishop's throne for three hundred years, the exquisite fragments of St. Werburgh's shrine have been restored to their original place.

In the north aisle a brass commemorates the work of Dean Howson, to whom, as the leading spirit of the great restoration, the cathedral owes its present seemly and stable condition.

Fine specimens of foreign metal work are to be seen in the aisle gates and graceful sanctuary candelabra given by the late Duke of Westminster.

## FROM THE NORTH-EAST

THE grouping of the north side of the cathedral is very different from the south. The small north transept takes the place of the prominent south transept, a wide-spreading lawn from which the perfectly proportioned chapter house rises, contrasts with the broken surface of the burial ground, while the Perpendicular aisle has been allowed to survive Sir Gilbert Scott's restoration and screens two bays of the Lady Chapel. Moreover, the stone on this side has not been so extensively restored and bears the marks of antiquity which add so greatly to the beauty of our ancient churches.

Abbot Simon Ripley and his successor (1485-1537) rebuilt the tower, which no doubt was originally intended to carry a spire. Though of no great height it serves very well to bind the various parts of the church together, and raise the otherwise low lines of the building.

The turrets and parapets of the tower and choir are entirely modern, as is the high-pitched roof of the Lady Chapel with its delicate cresting.



CHESTER CATHEDRAL



THE CHOIR, LOOKING EAST



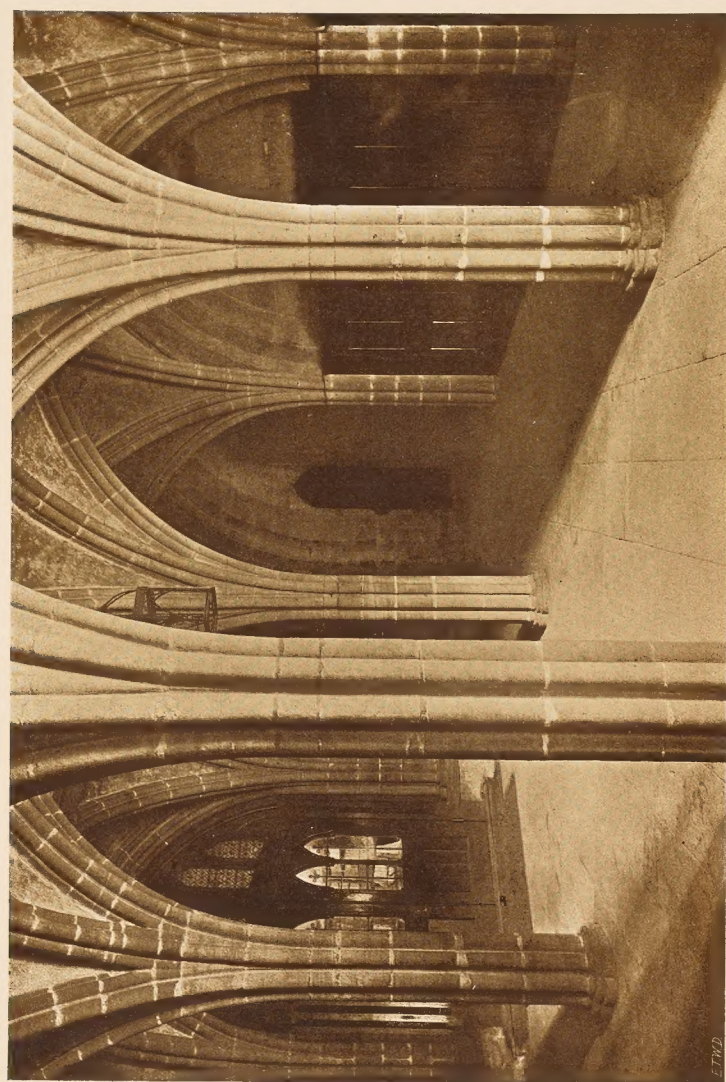
FROM THE NORTH-EAST

## THE CHAPTER HOUSE VESTIBULE

PROFESSOR FREEMAN has said that Chester presents one of the best examples of Benedictine domestic buildings in England. Though not so extensive as the more famous house at Durham, Chester certainly can claim some features of unique beauty.

Contrary to the usual custom the monks built on the north side of the church because of the already existing parish church on the south. A splendid crypt, probably the store-house of the monastery, is the chief survival of the Norman period. There are considerable remains of early masonry also in the cloisters, which were almost entirely rebuilt in the sixteenth century. It is in the chapter house, vestibule, and refectory, all perfect specimens of Early English work, that the builders attained their chief success. The vestibule especially is most harmoniously proportioned, and the skillful omission of the capitals of the piers gives it an air of unusual lightness. Such an early example of this omission is very rare, and it is thought to indicate a foreign influence. In the refectory is the famous reader's pulpit, the greatest antiquarian treasure of the monastery. The pulpit in Beaulieu Church, Hampshire, is its only rival.





THE CHAPTER HOUSE VESTIBULE







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